

Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative

Early Care and Education Work Group—
PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN SUB-GROUP

Tuesday, February 7, 2006 - 10 a.m. - 12 Noon

Members Present: Ed Barham, Geania Dickey, Martha Hiatt, Rich Huddleston, Nick Long, Vicki Mathews, Carladder Parham, Martha Reeder, and Paula C. Watson.

Regrets: Kathleen Stafford Branton, Jody Edrington, Sherri Jo McLemore, Pam Scarber, Kenetta Ridgell, and Michael Rowett.

Geania Dickey called the meeting to order. Self-introductions were made by the group.

Agenda Item #1: Overview - Martha Reeder

Discussion: Martha Reeder provided an overview of the Grant. The Maternal and Child Health Bureau awarded the Arkansas Department of Health a planning grant to design an integrated early childhood comprehensive system for children from birth to five. The Department of Health sub-contracted with the Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education to lead the programmatic activities of the grant. To implement the planning, five work groups were formed around the five areas of concern designed by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau:

- Early Care and Education
- Family Support
- Medical Home
- Parent Education
- Social-Emotional Health Work Group

These work groups have been meeting about two years and are staffed with stakeholders from a broad base of state agencies, public concerns, and private agencies.

The Early Care and Education group is working on a quality rating scale after listening to consultants and researching quality rating systems from other states. Other work groups are tying into QRS. For instance, the Medical Home group saw it as a way for child care providers to keep on hand health assistance forms (ARKIDS First). It will be a voluntary system (not a mandatory system). Most states choose a voluntary system. The two states that are mandatory are North Carolina and Tennessee. The group also studied all the state plans and decided to closely review states that were more in line with the Arkansas structure.

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Agenda Item #1, Continued: Overview - Martha Reeder

Discussion: The Early Care and Education Work Group appointed a sub-group to bring in a draft of the proposed Quality Rating Scale. They also appointed a group to look at public relations issues.

The QRS group is using a tool called, Stair Steps to Quality by Anne W. Mitchell. The first step in a QRS is to identify Standards. The next step is applying accountability to the standards, and the final step is financing the plan. The public relations group is to begin its work early in the process. Martha remarked that in every group she has worked with, public relations has been discussed. The public relations needs to be broad based at first, educating parents, the public, business owners and others in the community about what "high quality" child care is.

Money may not be available to sponsor a public relations campaign individually as groups, but, if we form partnerships and work together, pooling resources, maybe the group can come up with a workable campaign. We also still have access to the "Born Learning" web site, and we can tap our own resources in Arkansas. If we can pool resources and move our own message forward, we will connect together.

Agenda Items #2: The Umbrella - Geania Dickey

Discussion: Geania Dickey distributed copies of the September 2005 issue of Voices for American Children, "Translating School Readiness." There is a need for parents and the community to understand that the first five years in a child's life are significant. She referred to the fact that anyone or all of these goals could be used as the basis of our public relations campaign. What do young children and babies need? She called the group's attention to the following goals found on Page 2 in the article--

"In order to be school ready, all children need to:

- Experience high quality early learning environments, whether at home or in an early care and education setting;
 - Have enough to eat and the ability to live in safe, stable neighborhoods;
 - Be able to see a doctor (including dentists) under any circumstances so they can stay healthy and strong.
 - Have parents who are caring and attentive, equipped to be their children's first teachers, armed with the supports they need to be strong and capable caregivers; and
 - Attend schools that are adequately prepared to receive young children into their fold when they reach school age.
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- The questions were asked, "Does the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) still exist? Is there something currently on board for the NEGP? Are there further developments (of materials) related to the five points? If they have not already produced materials, they have access to groups that have produced materials.

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Agenda Item #2, Continued: The Umbrella - Geania Dickey

Discussion: Ed Barham asked the questions, "How much are we open to pursuing a major partner to back what we need? A serious partner, such as Wal-Mart? He indicated that he does not know a big name off the top of his head, but this group might think about what it can do in one year and consider doing one fairly significant event. If we have "star quality," the group may be able to find a business that will sponsor something like this.

Martha Reeder suggested that the group come up with an "umbrella" topic and then include the logos of every organization that participates. Each organization could then take off in its own direction. With each organization helping to push, it gives credibility.

Ed Barham also indicated that he is worried that this group is not far enough along to sign off on the five things. Ed also expressed concern about getting something started this year since we are already in the second month of the year.

Nick Long asked the questions, "What specifically is the goal?" "How can we sell it?" Ed Barham stated that this group has a pretty clear idea that when a day care is licensed, that it is safe. Parents want it "close to my house" and "can I afford it." Parents do not want by and large the same things that this group wants. Parents may not be looking deeply enough that a center provides something extra.

Vicki Mathews stated that parents do not know what high quality is—it may also be a status thing when they place their children in a certain day care. There is a need to increase awareness of high quality and what to look for in a high quality day care. There is a need to get the attention of the people first.

Vicki also reminded the group that unless something that parents want is produced, it will fall flat. There is a need to increase public support before rolling out the QRS program.

The question was asked, Aren't higher income parents more aware than lower income parents? This is not necessarily so. Maybe the group with the disposable income would be willing to spend a bit more with the awareness campaign. Before one get into a high quality child care, experience needs to be considered.

For \$75,000 you can't find much paid media. Parents are hungry for something.

Geania reminded the group that we seem to be going off in many directions. The idea is to come up with a plan, and then figure out what we need to make it happen. If awareness is our first thing, maybe the group needs to narrow down the audience and/or narrow the focus. There's a lot to be said for raising awareness at first. Perhaps we need to define what we want to start out with.

There's a need to be realistic starting off. We need to start with the simple things. We may need to narrow the audience. The committee that asked for this group was not very specific. We could choose a single topic and focus on it.

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Agenda Item #2, Continued: The Umbrella - Geania Dickey

Discussion: Nick Long asked the questions, Can we add someone to this committee? Can we add someone from an Ad Agency? Having someone that is in the profession and someone just to listen may be helpful as well. We need someone's perspective from the outside. Sometimes it takes an outside person to head us in the right direction.

Someone made the comment that Ed Barham has the experience and may be as "good as you got" for nothing. Ed's role is in the public information office at DHHS. Ed is what this group has unless we can find a volunteer currently working for an Ad Agency.

The charge from Early Care and Education was pretty general. This group might want to go back to the larger group and ask them to be more specific about what they expect from this group.

Martha Reeder stated that the overall message is "Quality Counts!" If we did something like quality counts with a simplistic message, then other pieces can be brought in now. Maybe we need to kick it off and then go from there to get some attention and be working on the other pieces that will take more money.

It was stated that "Born Learning" has a plan for getting the message out. One of the things would be to organize the work of making contacts. Everyone around the table would be organizing some kind of outreach. Martha encouraged everyone to go in to the web site and become familiar with it.

The Division of Health and Human Services has offices in every county of the state. We need to focus and try to do some things together.

Martha Reeder remarked that the "Born Learning" people have personalized some campaign. Arkansas's Governor is on the list. The primary message is: Children are born wanting to learn. The group could capitalize on everyday moments. Parents may not understand that utilizing everyday moments is important.

Coming up with the message will not be difficult. One function of this group may be to gather a list of organizations that can be helpful to the plan and try to get a commitment to help from the organizations.

It is important to have materials already developed before any type of event. "Quality Counts" sounds good, but we need to research whether it is copyrighted. We can gather messages from each of the work groups, put them together, and say this is how quality counts. Each work group is in the process of finishing their state plan for the comprehensive system.

The question was posed, "Do we have a final list of all the partners?" We need to list all the partners we have to make sure that we are not missing any. Groups are going to be able to generate free media for news coverage. This is helpful in educating parents directly. There are some groups with strong public relations people who may participate in the plan.

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Agenda Item #2, Continued: The Umbrella - Geania Dickey

Discussion: Martha reminded the group that at some point we may need to ask people to commit. The Division is looking internally about ways to fund the QRS. The Division is looking at what's available now and ways it can be re-directed.

Geania Dickey suggested that we need to list partners in the media or partners directly working with parents. We will use "Quality Counts" at the main message and refer back to the five groups for messages related to the five points. The initiative will include a kick off and print materials. Nick Long suggested that two or three overarching foci are needed.

The group began listing partners and additional potential partners:

*means working on

BLUE(contact with media or PR)

Good Faith Fund
Media
Cooperative Extension
AR Advocates
AETN
Division of Health
Division of County Operations*
AR Foundation for Medical Care (AFMC)*
Hospital Association*
Blue Cross*
PEDS*
Medical Services* (PCP's)
AR Department of Education*
United Way
Governor's Offices

RED(contact with families)

AR Early Childhood Association (AECA)
APEN
Child Care Resource and Referral
12/20 Wellness Committee*
ACT 603*
Early Childhood Commission
HIPPY

State Chamber of Commerce—encourage state CC to ask local CC groups to try to get them to be partners or sponsor an event.

All of these people may not be around the table but may work with this project. Other comments include the following: We may need to pick a couple of these participating partners (money or power) and get them on board. Once we make some definite decisions, we can expand. We may not need to broaden group at this time. We may need to proceed as is. There are some major national programs here in Arkansas. We need to extend the invitation to Blue Cross—they have a network. We may need to re-consider Blue Cross.

Agenda Items #3: Next Meeting Date - Adjournment

Discussion: The next meeting date is March 21, 2006, from 10 a.m. to 12 Noon at AR Advocates offices.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.